

# Combining moral philosophy and moral reasoning: The PAVE moral reasoning strategy

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*The ability to reason well is central to the concept of intelligence, but intelligence alone will not guarantee morality. To recognise the 'right' choice and to judge our own and others' actions, is to make an act of reason. To choose to value morality and to make the 'right' choice is an act of character. The link between intelligence and choice "makes the whole idea of morality possible in the first place...that's ultimately why we hold people responsible for what they do – because their intelligence gives them the power to choose how they'll behave" (White, 1988, p.72). This paper provides a moral reasoning strategy which may be useful to teachers. It is based on an understanding of Principles, Agreements, Virtues and End Consequences (PAVE).*

Gifted, morality, philosophy, reasoning, strategy

## INTRODUCTION

High levels of cognitive intelligence and affective intelligence lead to the development of character and ultimately the potential for moral vision. The thinking, feeling person, in whom intelligence and character combine, can achieve the highest level of human development – self-actualisation. It is a confluence between cognitive intelligence, affective intelligence and the disposition towards morality that can determine an individual's moral reasoning ability. The more confluence between the three, the greater the individual's capacity to reason and behave morally. Without the disposition towards morality, the individual lacks the motivation for moral action.

Context is also an important consideration. The environmental, social, personal and situational contexts will influence an individual's choice to reason or behave morally. Individuals may choose moral behaviour in some situations, but disregard it in others, depending on the importance of the situational context to their personal viewpoint.

## What is the PAVE moral reasoning strategy?

The moral reasoning strategy outlined in this paper borrows heavily from other problem-solving strategies, particularly Maker's (1995) discussion of moral dilemmas based on Kohlberg's (1964) theory of moral development, and Ruggiero's (1997) analysis of ethical issues, and has evolved from an earlier strategy devised by Barker and Henderson (2001). By including a consideration of the major philosophical schools of thought, this strategy gives the moral reasoner additional knowledge and skills with which to deliberate at greater depth and understanding. These philosophical perspectives are referred to as *Principles, Agreements, Virtues* and *End Consequences*. These four schools of thought are outlined in Table 1. However, further knowledge and understanding of moral philosophy is highly recommended. By taking the initial letters, the acronym of PAVE has been used to name this moral reasoning strategy.

**Table 1. Four moral perspectives**

<b>Principles</b> What makes an action right is whether it upholds a certain principle. Principles are like duties or rules that apply to <i>any</i> set of circumstances. So when someone argues that it is <i>never</i> right to murder, they are thinking about principles. Principles are very useful for dealing with large groups of people. Many laws are based on principles. Some common principles are: Do no harm. Always tell the truth. Keep your promises. Be fair.	<b>(End) Consequences</b> What makes an action right is whether it has good consequences, that is, whether it increases the welfare of the people affected by it. By ‘good’ we might mean happiness, well-being, pleasure, interest or satisfaction. . If large numbers of people are affected, you could consider the greatest good for the greatest number.
<b>Agreements</b> What makes an action right is whether it is consistent with what people involved expect to happen. People willingly enter into contracts with each other, either formally or informally, written or spoken, about the way they agree to treat each other.	<b>Virtues</b> What makes an action right is whether it is what a virtuous person would do. Virtues are character traits, like courage, compassion and integrity. A virtuous person will always do the right thing out of habit because it is in their character to do so.

Jewell, P. (2003)

In the process of paving a path, stones are laid which make a sure-footed foundation upon which to tread. The analogy of this process to the reasoning strategy also makes the acronym of PAVE an appropriate name because the strategy is a step-by-step process leading from an initial moral dilemma to a possible outcome. The steps of the strategy are presented in Figure 1. Along the way, it is to be hoped that a parallel development of moral reasoning ability will be founded.

In discussing moral dilemmas, one assumption that is made is that people in general seek to do the right thing. The central questions asked are:

- What *could* I do that is morally right?
- What *should* I do in this situation?
- What *will* I do? and importantly
- *Why* will I choose that course of action?

Rather than allowing students to act and react without thinking, the PAVE moral reasoning strategy encourages them to reflect on these very important questions. It empowers them to make reasoned moral choices, to understand the basis of others’ moral choices and to develop the skills with which to negotiate positive outcomes.

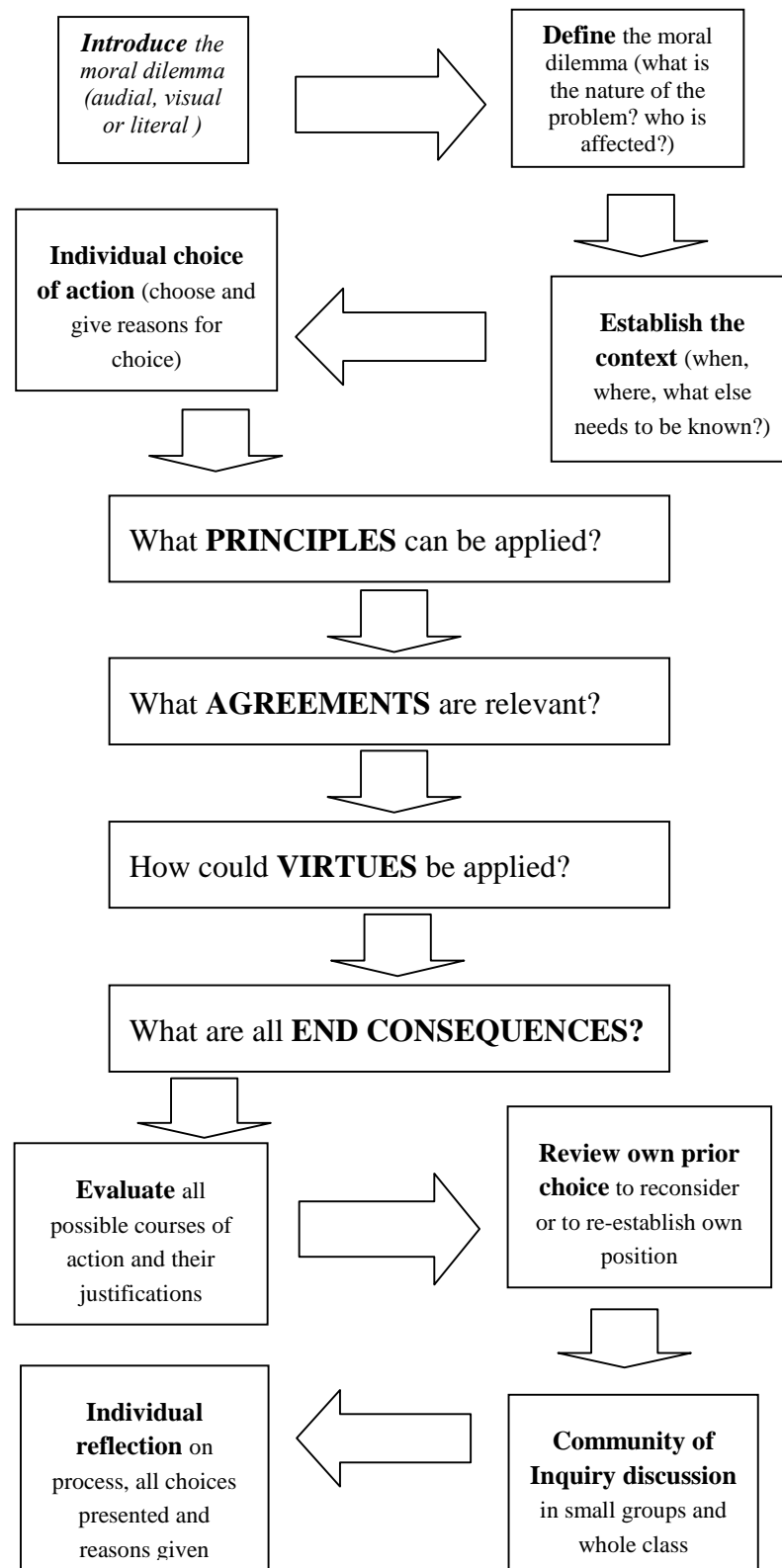
### **THE PAVE MORAL REASONING STRATEGY: EXPLANATION AND TEACHING STRATEGIES**

What follows is an explanation of the task to be done at each step of the PAVE moral reasoning strategy and some suggestions as to the way(s) in which the teacher can facilitate the process.

### **Presenting the Moral Dilemma**

The aim in presenting the moral dilemma to the students is to arouse their interest, curiosity and sense of personal involvement, such that a meaningful and controversial discussion may develop. Thus the way in which the dilemma is presented is very important. One way is to begin by asking the class some probing questions which link the issues in the dilemma about to be presented to the students’ own personal experiences. The dilemma may be presented in many forms such as by

viewing a short segment from a video of a film or news program, giving students some role plays to enact, or reading a short story to the class.



**Figure 1. The PAVE moral reasoning strategy**

***Step One: Define the moral dilemma and identify who is affected***

Having perceived that a moral dilemma exists, the first step in the process is to restate the dilemma – what exactly is the moral question involved? Integral to identifying the dilemma will be the identification of all the people involved - the main people as well as others affected by the outcome.

Students who are morally sensitive will quickly identify a moral issue, but in order to discuss the dilemma, all students need to understand exactly what and who are involved. In the classroom, this step can be taken as a whole group together, to ensure that all students are clear about the nature of the problem.

***Step Two: Establish the context***

Students also need to be clear about all the relevant facts of the situation. Where and when the situation occurs is important to establish, as context is critical in deciding upon what is the right action to take. Perhaps not all of the details necessary for making a decision are obvious, and questions may need to be asked to clarify the context of the dilemma. If not all the necessary information is available, then some speculations and assumptions may need to be made in order to advance. Younger children should be given as much information as they need, perhaps through them identifying the questions needing answers and the teacher providing the information, or perhaps giving all the information from the outset. Older children should be encouraged to ask 'what if' questions and to entertain a complexity of possibilities.

Again, the reasoning strategy depends upon these two initial steps being taken as a group to ensure that all students have the knowledge they need to make a reasonable choice.

***Step Three: Individual choice of action***

At this point in the process, each student should be able to write down, with their reasons, their own position as to the right course of action in the dilemma being discussed. At this stage they may not be completely decided but they need to take at least a tentative position.

***Step Four: Consider multiple moral perspectives***

The next step is a detailed process of holding the facts up to the scrutiny of each of the four Moral Philosophy perspectives in turn. Each of these four most commonly used philosophical perspectives offers criteria to help solve the moral dilemma of 'what ought to be done' by imposing a sense of order and moral imperatives. But each moral perspective on its own has limitations. Looking at the dilemma from all four perspectives is like examining a botanical specimen through four different procedures – each procedure will reveal the specimen in a different light and help to ascertain its nature, but a more complete understanding of its nature is possible by referring to all four forms of analysis.

During this process, students should be given guidance to help them to understand the criteria and limitations of each perspective, and how each perspective would determine right action in this particular situation. The justification of each perspective is as important for the student to understand as the action it advocates.

Initially the teacher should guide the students through this step. Scope is there to broaden the students' knowledge and understanding of Moral Philosophy with some extension work exploring this field and some of its greatest philosophers. What would Plato decide to do in this situation? What contributions has Kant made to our understanding of morality? How would Hobbes advise us to act?

It is to be hoped that the students will develop both knowledge of morality and Moral Philosophy as well as the skills of applying this knowledge. Once they have been guided through the four perspectives, they can be tasked to apply the criteria independently. Wall charts may be displayed to act as prompts in remembering the main focus of each school of thought.

Question prompts for each of the moral perspectives are included at the end of this paper. The class could be divided into four groups, with each group assigned one perspective to explore and then report their answers back to the whole class.

### ***Step Five: Exploration of alternatives***

The students at this point should be able to explain what each person or interest group relevant to the dilemma would want to happen from their point of view and why. This is important because the students may identify with only one of the people involved, but a well-reasoned choice will also consider others' points of view. The students need to empathise with others to understand that different people may have different needs and priorities from each other and from themselves. Role plays can be useful here in challenging students to 'try on' different people's points of view and attitudes.

### ***Step Six: Review of individual choice of action***

The students can now look back at their original choice (Step 3). Has their original position altered? Having all possible courses of action and justifications at hand, the students now have to decide what they think is the overriding priority, and which criteria for judgment best 'solves' the dilemma. There will be some dilemmas where a couple of perspectives seem to carry equal importance and yet come to different conclusions. Students may be overwhelmed by the difficulty of singling out and justifying one course of action. The teacher may need to give them guidance towards finding some way to resolve such an impasse.

Attaining this step may be the desired end point of a lesson, perhaps even the completion of step six being set as a homework task. This then allows a full lesson when resuming the strategy to discuss at length the moral choices involved.

### ***Step Seven: Community of inquiry discussion***

When we decide on a course of action, we need to be able to communicate our decision to others, giving our reasons to support our decision, in the context of the Community of Inquiry. This next step requires students to share their ideas, in pairs, in small groups and finally as a whole class. The pairs and small groups could be comprised of students who agree as to the course of action and at this point they can share with each other the reasons for their decision. This should help the students to clarify and consolidate their own positions, as well as listening to and considering others' points of view.

Each student needs to be able to present her/his choice of action and defend it with clear justifications. This gives them the opportunity to apply their reasoning ability to the moral issues in question. Students will vary as to their levels of reasoning ability. An active Community of Inquiry discussion will allow students to observe higher levels of ability and reflect on their own reasoning ability. This exposure to higher levels of development provides cognitive conflict and may act as a catalyst to the development of their own moral reasoning ability.

The role of the teacher is critical in facilitating the discussion. A list of possible question starters based on Bloom's and Krathwohl's Taxonomies is provided in the Appendix.

Time is always a critical factor in this step. The aim of the discussion may be to voice and compare different choices, and time may run short when the discussion is still in full swing. If the

aim of the discussion is to reach a consensus as to the best right choice of action (for example, what rules should the class adopt in order to resolve a problem) the lesson may end before the group has collectively arrived at a satisfactory decision. If this is the case, some students may feel frustrated because they still have no 'answer'. Philosophers love endless discussions; some students are more impatient! One caution here is to beware implying that all investigations concerning the right thing to do necessarily must reach a single correct answer. That would negate the whole purpose of conducting a Community of Inquiry discussion. Students are encouraged to present conflicting points of view, provide reasons for that view, listen to other views and underlying reasons and make a choice, with justification, as to what they believe is the right course of action.

The *process* of the discussion is important in itself. However, it *is* important to give each discussion some closure. Take some time before the lesson ends to perhaps summarise the discussion so far, to note the progress the group has made, to identify the different positions being taken, perhaps ask people to summarise an alternative viewpoint to their own, possibly even to ask the students by a show of hands which position they agree with, or to ask students to stand on a number line to indicate how satisfied they felt at the end of the discussion from zero (not at all) to ten (very satisfied).

### ***Step Eight: Individual reflection***

The last step is one of individual reflection. It may be that the student's original position as to the right thing to do in this situation has been reinforced as a consequence of the Community of Inquiry discussion. It may be that the student's choice remains unaltered, but the reasons for holding this view have changed. Perhaps the group discussion has caused the student to rethink his or her original choice. Ultimately students need to make their own decisions autonomously, and should be able to communicate the reasons behind their choices. Whatever the outcome, thinking about thinking, or metacognition, is a conscious, self-evaluative process which serves to consolidate the reasoning process and reconcile any concerns.

This step may be completed as a homework task, or it may be possible to allow some lesson time for the students to reflect whilst their focus is maintained.

Some students may need some guidance to channel their reflections in a more constructed form. Proforma sheets may be devised by the teacher that ask the students to answer specific questions about their choices, the most helpful comment that was made, the most difficult aspect of the dilemma and so forth.

## **WHY USE MORAL DILEMMAS TO ENCOURAGE MORAL DEVELOPMENT?**

Most theories of moral development describe the transition to higher stages of development occurring through the arousal of inner conflict (Piaget, 1930; Kohlberg, 1966; Dabrowski, 1972; Gilligan, 1982; Rest, Navarez, Thoma and Bebeau, 2000). It would seem that, just like the grain of sand causing the oyster to produce the pearl, so too the individual needs to experience a level of inner friction or 'disequilibrium' (Piaget, 1965) in order to advance to higher levels of development. The verbal conflict aroused through consideration and discussion of a moral dilemma can create the desired stimulation under the careful guidance of a perceptive and thoughtful teacher.

A **moral dilemma** is generally agreed to exist when an issue calls into question what right course of action should ensue. To decide whether or not an issue presents as a moral dilemma, the question being asked needs to concern the nature of what is right, and one choice of action must be selected from several possible alternative actions, each of which can be justified in some way. The discussion of moral dilemmas actively involves the students in the process of decision-

making and demands of them a personal commitment to the choice. Rather than expecting them to passively and almost vicariously absorb morality by being given good moral exemplars to follow, this active, student-centred approach is far more likely to be meaningful and effective.

### **HOW CAN MORAL REASONING BE APPLIED ACROSS THE CURRICULUM?**

As a vehicle for encouraging the development of moral reasoning, the study of moral dilemmas through literature, film, subject application, current affairs, personal experience or relationships, and the teaching of moral reasoning strategies in this context, has valuable applications. Subjects studied not simply for their technical worth, but in a way that gives students an understanding of the social condition and context will 'feed their moral interest and develop moral insight' (Dewey, in Rice, 1996).

Reasoning strategies are best learnt in the context of content that is relevant to the subject and students being taught. Moral dilemmas can be found in all curriculum subjects. Moral dilemmas revolve around key moral issues such as civil liberties, social norms, authority, personal conscience, truth, punishment, life, sex, property and contract (Kohlberg, 1973). Whenever an issue raised prompts the questions 'what should I do?' and there are several justifiable alternatives, each with different outcomes, then a moral dilemma is presented.

Not only *can* moral reasoning be applied across the curriculum, but it also *should* be applied in all areas in order to maximise the students' efficacy. Teachers cannot assume that reasoning strategies are automatically transferred to contexts outside that in which they are explicitly taught.

### **WILL GOOD MORAL REASONING ENSURE GOOD MORAL BEHAVIOUR?**

Moral reasoning attempts to synthesise different views that are, in a sense, rival views. Although the aim is to achieve an outcome, a decision that is good or right, the process is as significant as the end product. The reasoning process as a whole is an interplay between the parts, the parts are connected by their conflict into a dynamic tension of logic and debate, and metacognition, or reflection, is the key to achieving a personal commitment to an outcome.

Jewell (2000) asks the question whether 'a morally developed person [is] one who *feels* strongly about moral issues or *understands* moral issues or *acts* ethically when dealing with other people'. Human beings are free agents who may or may not choose to act morally. Rational, independent thinkers make decisions after considering the information at hand, reflecting upon their knowledge base and making connections between their knowledge and understanding, supporting their decisions with sound reasoning. In order to act morally, one must place importance on moral behaviour and see oneself as a moral agent. Whether or not a person chooses to act morally in all situations is dependent not necessarily on their capacity for moral reasoning but on other personality factors that provide the motivation for moral behaviour.

The distinction must be drawn between advanced moral reasoning and advanced moral development. The former implies the abstract intellectual ability to recognise a moral issue and decide upon the 'right' outcome. The latter implies the practical application of the moral imperative. This requires other personality factors such as courage, autonomy and altruism. The best moral choices will be made by people who are able to reason well and who also desire to do the right thing.

### **CONCLUSION**

Students need to learn how to understand the complex issues they will face in the real world beyond school. More importantly, they need the skills of analysis to sort out and clarify the nature of the real world in order to navigate their course through life. Perhaps most importantly, they

need to develop positive dispositions or habits of mind that will sustain their sense of hope and purpose throughout their lives. The goal of Renzulli's work in Operation Houndstooth (in Colangelo and Davis, 2003, p.84):

is to infuse into the process of schooling, experiences related to the [personal characteristics that are the components of positive development] that will contribute to the development of wisdom and a satisfying lifestyle.

Renzulli's conception of giftedness is far broader than an IQ score, and his challenging reminder (2003, p.83) to teachers of gifted students:

as persons who are the stewards and nurturers of today's potentially able young people [is that we] can have a profound affect on shaping the values and directions towards which future contributors of remarkable accomplishments devote their energies.

Whether or not gifted children should be burdened with the responsibility of being our future leaders and society's hope for a better future is disputable. However, society will be stronger and richer if its members are able to make sound moral judgments, develop positive moral outlooks and take sound moral action. Working with students to encourage their development of these skills and dispositions will be in the best interests, not only of the students themselves, but also society in general.

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## APPENDIX: PAVE MORAL REASONING STRATEGY

### Thoughtful Question Starters Using Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives

LEVELS OF TAXONOMY:	To Encourage Good Critical Thinking: Question Starters
<b>REMEMBER</b>	
This is the information level which asks for the facts, definitions, and clarifies the purpose of the discussion. It seeks to determine the evidence underlying what we think and ascertain what we know.	What are the facts? Who is involved? What is the problem? What happened? Where and when did it happen? What proof is there...? Please remind me of the facts about...?
<b>UNDERSTAND</b>	
This is the interpretation level of questioning that seeks explanations and illustrations of the facts and helps to clarify understanding.  (* Be careful not to let the discussion be waylaid by endless examples and personal stories. The teacher may need to step in and ask questions that will refocus the discussion onto the main purpose at hand.)	What do you find puzzling? What do you mean by...? Why is this a problem...? For whom is it a problem? Why do you say that...? How does that relate to what ...said? Can you say that in another way? I'm no expert, perhaps you could explain that to me? Can you repeat what ...just said in your own words? Have you made any assumptions when you say...? Can you give an example of...?* Can you explain why...acted that way/said that? Can we clarify that point? What could have happened if...? Can you expand upon what you just said?
<b>APPLY</b>	
Once students understand the facts and issues, they can apply this knowledge in meaningful ways. If responses indicate flaws in their understanding or interpretation of the facts, you may need to summarise and display what the class knows on the whiteboard, or task the class to write down their own summaries of all relevant facts.	Do you know of a similar problem? How was that solved? Could that resolution apply here? Can you think of a situation where ( <i>this suggestion/idea etc</i> )would not work? What questions would you ask a particular person involved if you could? Can you list of all the pros and cons of that idea? Could you report the main ideas in a news flash?
<b>ANALYSE</b>	
Being able to break down the 'big picture' into its component parts can help students to distinguish the faults and strengths in arguments. Also it helps identify what is or isn't relevant, what assumptions or generalisations are being made that undermine moral reasoning.	Is that a good enough reason? If that is true, what else is true? If that is true, what then must be false? What consequences will follow? Who is most positively/negatively affected by this? What motivation was there to do this? At what point did things change? What problems did that cause? What positive outcomes happened as a result? Is that an assumption?
<b>EVALUATE</b>	
Holding ideas up to check and judge their worth or appropriateness to the task is an important executive thinking skill. It is most important that the students can give their reasons for why they judge something to be so.	Are our sources reliable? Is this point relevant? How do we know...? Do you agree with...? What is one solution? How can you justify that? What would you say if you were the judge/ prosecutor...? What reasons did you find most convincing for...? Is there a better solution? Are these 2 ideas compatible/different/the same? Does that person simply act/react, or does s/he consider...?
<b>CREATE</b>	
Creative questions can be asked at any time, and in the spirit of the Community of Inquiry, all contributions are accepted, and lateral and creative thinking is valued. These questions ask students to look at creative solutions or to look beyond the situation. Through the process of reasoning, stimulated by good questioning, the students will gain a knowledge and understanding of the issue, be able to analyse and evaluate all the relevant facts and opinions and can then construct or hypothesise solutions or new ways to view the problem.	How else could that be interpreted/viewed? What would you change if you could? What questions could we ask to move forward? How could you best do that? What decisions have we made? What implications can be drawn? Where do we go from here? What could you propose? What if...?

### Thoughtful Question Starters Using Krathwohl's Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives

LEVELS OF TAXONOMY:	To Encourage Good Critical Thinking: Question Starters
<b>RECEIVE</b>	
This is the level of thinking where the student displays awareness – listens, notices and observes. Information is received through all senses.	What do you notice about this? What did you hear ... say? How did that make you feel? How would you feel if ... ?
<b>RESPOND</b>	
Students are encouraged to discuss or explain their thoughts and ideas. In sharing them with others, students are often able to crystallise and clarify their own thoughts and receive valuable feedback from others.	Can you suggest why that might be? Can you offer a way to proceed from here? What was your initial reaction? How do you feel about it now? What should we think about first?
<b>VALUE</b>	
The student chooses a concept or position or behaviour that he/she believes is worthy. It is not a matter of being told what is important, but is what the student values.	How could you defend...? What would you like to see happen here? What appeals to you most about...? Whose idea do you identify most closely with? What do you disagree with?
<b>ORGANISE</b>	
The student reviews, questions and arranges values and ideas into an ordered system or plan.	Which of your values can be applied here to give some structure? How can you figure out...? What is the best choice, based on what you care about?
<b>CHARACTERISE</b>	
When asking students to connect with a problem in an emotional way, they need to have some positive outcome or resolution as an outlet for their feelings. Characterising asks students to live their beliefs. The student voices his/her beliefs and affirms his/her values.	What can you say to affirm each position? Which person involved is someone in whom you would confide? Imagine if you believed someone's actions to be wrong, what would you do? Do you respect someone who changes their mind? How would you have behaved?